# HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR OUTCOMES?

**Outcomes are** changes in a target audience's skills, knowledge, behavior, attitude, and/or status/life condition. They are:

- ❖ measurable;
- ❖ stated in terms of who, what, when, and how much;
- ❖ stated in terms of how they will be measured;
- ❖ clear on how much change is expected;
- ❖ stated in numerical terms.

The two most important considerations are:

- ❖ Participation in the data collection activities (e.g. interview or survey) must be voluntary, and not required to receive the service
- ❖ Participants' privacy or confidentiality must be respected

In order to demonstrate the impact of your program, you will need to measure the anticipated outcomes. How will you see the changes in your participants? What method will best capture what has happened as a result of your project?

- ◆ First you need to consider what type of information you need to collect: factual or subjective? About attitudes or behavior? How often will you need to collect data? monthly? annually?
- ◆ Next you must think about whether the information is already being collected by the library or by some other agency. If so, do you have access to it? Will it be reliable (consistent) enough for your purposes? Will it be valid (accurate) enough?
- ◆ If you have to collect the data yourself, is an instrument (e.g. test or survey form) already available for you to use? What resources (e.g. expertise, staff time, money) are available?
- ◆ Do you need to collect data before and after your program to document change? You probably will if you are expecting an improvement in a behavior or attitude. If the participants are acquiring something new, though, you will not need a pre and post-test.

## Sample Measurable Outcomes Statements
Use the following as examples for creating outcomes statement(s)for your project. All of these statements indicate a positive change in people's lives.

- *35% of participants will replace their lawns with drought-tolerant plants as a result of attending the library's water conservation program series. (change in behavior)*

- *At least 75% of learners will report an increase in reading ability as a result of participating in the library's literacy program. (change in skill)*

- *60% of high school students will say they now know the difference between a debit card and credit card as a result of attending the library's financial literacy training. (increased knowledge)*

- *40% of people using the library's genealogy resources report a better understanding of their lineage (increased knowledge)*

- *At least 55% of workshop attendees will say they now feel more confident in their ability to conduct an effective community assessment. (change in attitude)*

- *45% of students will say their math grade increased by at least one grade level because of the help they received through the library's after-school homework center. (change in status)*

The six **most common data collection methods** are:

1. Review of existing records
2. Surveys (in person or online)
3. Interviews (in person or by phone)
4. Self-report (written or oral)
5. Observation (by a trained and neutral person)
6. Tests

The following is an overview of these data collection methods with some questions to consider when deciding which method(s) to use.

## 1. Review of existing records

**Advantages:** inexpensive; easy; unobtrusive to participants; good for behavior changes
**Disadvantages:** records may not define terms as you do; records may not be kept consistently
**Caution:** you may need consent of agency and/or participant

Things to consider:
1. Do existing records collect the information you will measure?
2. Can you get access to them?
3. Are they kept consistently?
4. Will you be able to get permission to use them?

## 2. Surveys (in person or online)

**Advantages:** excellent for changes in awareness, intention, and attitude; yields user's perspective
**Disadvantages:** responses may not be accurate or candid; language may be an obstacle; may be difficult to get enough responses to be valid if response rate is low
**Caution:** the initial creation and testing of survey form can be expensive

Things to consider:
1. Will participants be able to understand a written form?
2. Will they be able to respond in writing?
3. Will they be willing to answer your questions honestly?
4. Will they be able to answer accurately?

## 3. Interviews (in person or by phone)

**Advantages:** yields user's perspective; allows follow-up questions
**Disadvantages:** responses may not be accurate or candid; labor-intensive; expensive to do and to analyze
**Caution:** interviewers must be well-trained

Things to consider:
1. Do you need information from the participants' perspective?
2. Do you need to ask open-ended questions?
3. Will participants be willing to be interviewed?
4. Will participants be able to respond to an interviewer?

## 4. Anecdotal Self-Report (written or oral)

**Advantages:** excellent for attitude change; inexpensive to collect; allows participants to express themselves
**Disadvantages:** reports may not be accurate or candid; labor-intensive to analyze; language may be an obstacle
**Caution:** may be difficult to get users to participate

Things to consider:
1. Do journals or other written assignments fit your program?
2. Will the participants be willing to self-report?
3. Will participants be able to self-report?
4. Will you be able to get what you need from their reports?

5. **Observation (by a trained and neutral person)**

   **Advantages:** excellent for measuring skills; avoids self-report bias; may be unobtrusive to participant
   **Disadvantages:** you may need consent of participant; a protocol and reporting form must be created
   **Caution:** observers must be carefully selected and well-trained

   Things to consider:
   1. Are you measuring an observable skill or behavior?
   2. Will there be an opportunity for observation?
   3. Will the participants be comfortable being observed?
   4. If not, can someone observe covertly?

6. **Tests**

   **Advantages:** excellent for skills; inexpensive to collect and analyze; forms may be available
   **Disadvantages:** only appropriate for changes in knowledge or skill; language may be an obstacle
   **Caution:** if testing for gained knowledge, administer the exact same test instrument before and after the learning experience

   Things to consider:
   1. Are you measuring changes in skill or knowledge?
   2. Are there existing tests you can use?
   3. Will participants be willing to take the test?
   4. Will they be able to take a test orally or in writing?

Whenever possible, use the most direct method possible. For knowledge or skills, this may be tests or observation. For attitude change, this may be self-report or interview. For behavior, this may be records or tests.